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2013/08/01 : CIA-RDP09-02295R000100050001-0

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Handcarried to PDB for
President's briefing sheet

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USSR: SHIFTING PROPAGANDA STRATEGY ON THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

Soviet propaganda on the United States is carefully tailored to reflect the Kremlin's expectations for bilateral dialogue. Soviet officials and propagandists have at times painted U.S. intentions in the direst terms, and at other times in remarkably optimistic terms, depending on whether Moscow believed that bilateral talks would yield agreements furthering Soviet aims. The following item is drawn from a recently completed study exploring the Kremlin's evolving propaganda strategy toward your administration since the November 1980 elections.

The current Soviet propaganda broadside against U.S. policy contrasts starkly with Moscow's public description of your administration's intentions in the wake of the November 1980 elections. Moscow's interest in opening an immediate dialogue at that time was evident in Soviet propaganda's optimistic projections of your administration's policies and in the leadership's effort to demonstrate flexibility on SALT. Brezhnev on 17 November pledged to ignore what had been said in "the heat of the election struggle" and to respond to any "constructive steps" your administration might take. He emphasized the importance of continuing the "SALT process" but ignored the SALT II treaty. At the same time, Soviet propaganda claimed that you had become increasingly "moderate" during the election campaign and that you were giving "foremost priority" to an improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations.

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Following your inauguration, Moscow's posture entered a period of flux. Soviet officials mixed sharp attacks on your administration's criticism of Soviet policy with suggestions that U.S. policy might still prove to be more accommodating. In a major address to the Soviet party congress at the end of February, Brezhnev rebuked your administration for making statements that seem "intended to poison" bilateral relations but he expressed hope that U.S. policymakers would ultimately "look at things more realistically." Following the party congress, Soviet foreign policy spokesmen disagreed openly on whether definitive conclusions could yet be drawn about your administration's foreign policy course.

Moscow's shift to a decidedly pessimistic public posture on your administration was signaled in Brezhnev's 9 May speech. In this speech, Brezhnev placed your administration in the camp of those Western statesmen who regard military superiority over the USSR as their "main political credo" and who reject the solution of international problems through negotiations. In the wake of Brezhnev's speech, Defense Minister Ustinov and other Soviet officials have accused your administration of returning to the cold war and breaking off the SALT process.

Moscow's shifting views of your administration coincided with its increasing hopes that West European doubts about U.S. arms control policy could scuttle NATO deployment of U.S. medium-range missiles.

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Since mid-May, Moscow has launched a major propaganda campaign designed to foster the belief that U.S. expressions of readiness for talks on LRTNF are "camouflage" for an unprecedented military buildup. In a June speech, Brezhnev claimed that the United States has made no move toward talks and accused your administration of "trying to lull its allies and public opinion." Soviet propaganda quickly seized on the U.S. decision to produce the Enhanced Radiation Warhead as grist for the effort to encourage doubts about your administration's commitment to arms control.

Judging from its tactics under previous administrations, Moscow's harsh rhetoric about U.S. intentions on arms control is likely to continue until bilateral talks on strategic arms begin to show signs of substantive progress.

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